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THE
MILITARY GEOGRAPHY
OF
AFGHANISTAN.

PART I.

BADAKHSHAN



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CALCUTTA:
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF GOVERNMENT PRINTING, INDIA

1893.

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NOTE.

"The Military Geography of Afghanistan" has been compiled in five parts, namely:—

Part I. *Badakhshan*, by Major E. G. Barrow, Indian Staff Corps.

Part II. *Afghan Turkistan*, by Major E. G. Barrow, Indian Staff Corps.

Part III. *Herat*, by Major E. G. Barrow, Indian Staff Corps.

Part IV. *Kabul*, by Captain A. H. Mason, D. S. O., Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master General, Intelligence Branch.

Part V. *Farah and Kandahar*, by Colonel E. B. Elles, Assistant Quarter-Master General, Intelligence Branch.

The object of this work is to present in a concise and readable form information about the several provinces of Afghanistan of interest from a military point of view. This information has been compiled from reports, gazetteers, route books, and the records of the Intelligence party with the Afghan Boundary Commission.

The work was commenced in 1891 and finished in 1893, before the Kabul Mission took place. It is important to remember this as events are constantly happening, and fresh knowledge is being acquired, which tend to modify statements and opinions contained in this work. For instance, on page 2 of Part I, Major Barrow in writing of the road from the Baroghil pass to Mastuj *via* the Yarkhun valley, describes it as "an impassable route in summer and very difficult in winter." From reports lately received from Captain F. E. Younghusband, C.I.E., and Lieutenant G. K. Cockerill, who examined this route in October and November 1893, respectively, it appears that the route in question is easy for eight months in the year, namely, from September to May, and that when it is closed, there is an alternative route *via* the Kankhun pass which is open during the summer.

It should also be remembered that any opinions given or deductions made, are only the personal views of the writers and have no official authority.

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PART I.

BADAKHSHAN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

The first great geographical and political division of Afghanistan which it is convenient to describe is the province of Badakhshan, which occupies the extreme north-eastern portion of the Afghan dominions beyond the Hindu Kush. It must be clearly understood that this political division embraces a good deal more than the ancient kingdom of Badakhshan. Just as in India there are two Bengals—the Presidency and the Province; so here there are two Badakhshans—the political Badakhshan, which comprises the Usbak province of Kataghan or Kunduz, as well as the outlying Tajik States known as Wakhan, Shighnan, etc., and the geographical or historical Badakhshan, which lies between Kataghan and the Upper Oxus. For the information embodied in this part of the work, I have relied chiefly on my own travels and reports and on those of Mr. Ney Elias; while for the deductions and conclusions drawn therefrom I alone am entirely responsible, so that the views expressed are merely personal ones, and should not be given the weight of official authority.

This region, though unlikely to become the theatre of war, and though somewhat *en l'air* as regards Afghanistan generally, is one which, from its situation contiguous to the British frontier line of the Hindu Kush, is destined to exercise a considerable influence on our military policy. The importance of this region lies in the fact that even now it is a field for Russian intrigue,—intrigue which may soon be followed by forcible annexation,—a step which we are probably powerless to prevent, however much we may regret it. The position thus gained will then offer to the Russians a secure and unassailable base from which to sow intrigues among the tribes dwelling on the southern side of the Hindu Kush, and also a possible means of annoying us by the employment of small columns launched on our right or northern flank with a view to disturbing or influencing our combinations in the main theatre of war. How such attacks may be met is fully discussed in my secret "*Final Report on the strategical aspect of the Eastern Hindu Kush Regions*," to which attention is invited. Further allusion to that subject is therefore unnecessary here, and I shall confine myself to the strategical aspect of the country north of the great natural rampart called by us the Hindu Kush.

PHYSICAL FEATURES.

The whole extent of country is for the most part a waste of sterile, rocky, snow-capped mountains, divided in the east by the shallow, flat, alluvial depressions known as *pamirs*, and in the west by deep and narrow valleys, often remarkable for their green and luxuriant aspect; while in the extreme north-western corner the mountains give place to the level fens and plains which stretch to the Lower Oxus. The main feature in this mountainous land is the mighty Oxus with its numerous affluents. Rising as it does high up in the Pamirs, and draining one of the largest and loftiest snowfields in the world, this river is remarkable for the force with which it has cut its way through the deepest gorges, and for the vast masses of alluvial soil which it has carried to the plains of Central Asia. The mountain ranges for the most part vary from ten to twenty thousand feet, and their general direction is from east to west, though there is one great spur which, springing from Tirich Mir (25,426 feet) in the Hindu Kush, runs north, forcing the Oxus to make its great northward bend, while at the same time it forms the natural eastern boundary of Badakhshan. There is also the great watershed running north and south which separates the drainage of the Oxus region from

that of Kashgaria. The only other point to notice is that all the drainage of Wakhan, Shighnan, Roshan, and the Pamirs collects in the Oxus just below Wamar, while that of Badakhshan is carried to the Oxus by the Kokcha. Neither the Oxus nor the Kokcha are navigable within the limits of the region described. Finally, we have that stupendous mountain range known to us as the Hindu Kush, which, with the Himalayas, is the backbone of Asia, and distinctly demarcating the natural limits of the Indian Empire forms as it were its great natural northern rampart. This range, therefore, merits a few words of separate description.

THE HINDU KUSH.

This term is really only applicable to the mountain range north of Kabul, but it is a convenient geographical expression for the whole of the great watershed dividing the drainage of the Indus from that of the Oxus. It is a true *sierra*, being almost everywhere jagged, rocky, precipitous and arid, destitute of trees, and with but little grass or herbage of any sort. The altitude of the range is, as a rule, between 15,000' and 18,000', while there are numerous peaks rising from 20,000' to 25,000'. Above 15,000' snow is eternal, and a more inhospitable, desolate region it is impossible to imagine. Between Kanjut and Kafirstan there are over a dozen passes, but certainly not more than four are practicable for the passage of troops and that only for about four months. These passes are the Kilik, the Khorabort or Karumbar, the Baroghil, and the Dorah. The first three come within the sphere of influence of a Russian column advancing across the Pamirs from Ferghana, while the Dorah would be the objective of a movement through Badakhshan.

The Kilik pass is at the head of the Hunza valley or Kanjut, from which it leads into the Taghdumbash Pamir. In summer and autumn it is an easy route for laden animals, but the pass being at an altitude of 15,000', there is deep snow till late in June. Apart from the fact that our influence is now supreme in Hunza, the pass never was, or could be, a really good line of approach, as by the 1st of May, or even earlier, the road to Hunza, owing to the swollen state of the rivers, becomes quite impracticable for beasts of burden or even led horses. No one who has not traversed Hunza from end to end can have any idea of the physical difficulties of this route on the southern side of the pass. Hunza was in fact a *cul de sac* into which a Russian force might have penetrated, but where, at all events, its progress could have been easily arrested. Now-a-days attack by this line is out of the question.

The Khorabort or Karumbar pass.—This pass leads from the left bank of the Panja, between Bozai Gumbaz and Langar over the Hindu Kush, east of the Karumbar lake to the Ashkuman valley. In summer and up till September the road is totally impassable owing to the water in the bed of the Karumbar river down which it goes. In autumn or winter the bad places are avoided by constantly fording the river and the route is then practicable for laden animals. The *kotal* itself is steeper and more severe than the Darkot, so it cannot be described as a good or even an easy route for troops; moreover there is a glacier on the southern side which is constantly shifting, and sometimes closes the pass for years together. On the whole it seems very unlikely that an attack would be made by this route.

The Baroghil, leading from Sarhad, is an extraordinary depression in the great range, its altitude being only about 12,700'. The rise is extremely gentle, and there is practically no *kotal*. It is a sort of grassy trough about half a mile wide, and were it not for the difficulties on the southern side a railway might be taken across the Hindu Kush by this pass. After crossing the range the Yarkhun river is reached, and from this point there are two roads—one by the Darkot to Yasin, the other down the Yarkhun valley to Mastuj. The latter is, practically speaking, an impassable route in summer and very difficult in winter. None but a small force unaccompanied by animals could use it. The Darkot pass is about 15,000' high, and for laden animals is a most difficult route, as it lies over a snow covered glacier: a small column might attempt to use it, but such a force could be easily opposed from the Yasin side. Altogether I do not think the Baroghil at all a probable objective.

The Dorah is the great *kafilā* route connecting Badakhshan with Chitral, and from July to October it is constantly used by traders with laden mules and ponies. The altitude of the *kotal* is about 14,800' and, considering this great elevation, the pass is a singularly easy one. From Zebak to Chitral it is 84 miles, or 8 marches. There can be no doubt of the possibility of this being made a line of operations, but at the same time on the southern side of the pass there are several admirable positions in which a small force could resist an army. On the whole I am inclined to think that a diversion might be attempted by this line (*vide* Secret Report).

BOUNDARIES.

The province of Badakhshan is bounded on the west by the Afghan province of Turkistan (*vide* Chapter III, page 16, and also Chapter I of Part II), on the south by the Hindu Kush, and on the north and east by the Russian and Chinese empires, though the exact boundaries have never yet been authoritatively defined.

The question of these international boundaries is one of vital importance to us. On its settlement depends not only the integrity of the Afghan dominions, but also whether or not England and Russia shall be directly contiguous in Asia; and as this is the problem which, above all others, gives us a direct and immediate interest in studying the military geography of Turkistan, I need make no apology for discussing the subject fully and freely. The *de facto* boundary of the Russian dominions is practically the southern watershed of the Alai valley, and the actual southern and eastern boundaries of Darwaz, a Bokharan province, coterminous with Badakhshan on the south and Roshan on the east: but for many years past the green line of the Russian frontier has been drawn on maps along the southern watershed of the Khargosh Pamir, or, more correctly speaking, the Great Kara Kul basin. It is only quite recently, since 1891, that Russia has taken active measure to enforce her pretensions to territories south of this long recognised line of demarcation. On the other hand, Afghanistan has since 1883 been in *de facto* possession of Shighnan and Roshan, as well as of Wakhan, while from time immemorial these states have been to a certain extent dependent and tributary to Badakhshan. The occupation of the district on the right bank of the Oxus was, however, in defiance of the Granville-Gortschakoff agreement of 1873, which defined the Oxus, *i.e.*, the Victoria branch of the Panja, as the northern boundary of the Afghan possessions. On this unfortunate agreement Russia has taken her stand and has met all proposals for a Boundary Commission by insisting on that agreement forming the basis of negotiations. As, therefore, everything depends on how far that agreement is now to be observed, I give in full an extract from the Introduction to the "Gazetteer of the Afghan provinces of the Upper Oxus", which bears directly on the question of that agreement.

"By the agreement of 1873, the Oxus was accepted as the Russo-Afghan boundary, from its supposed main source in the Victoria lake to the neighbourhood of Khwajah Saleh. If this boundary is still considered to hold good, it means that we surrender a large portion of Afghan territory, to which, under no pretext, have the Bokharans or Russians any right, except that conferred by an arrangement which was made without adequate knowledge of the geographical, ethnological, or historical conditions ruling in the region in question.

"To begin with the geographical aspect of the question, it is more than doubtful whether the Victoria branch of the Oxus is the main river; in fact, I should say that in no respect can that honour be claimed for it. If length is to be considered the true criterion, either the Sarhad branch (Ab-i-Wakhan) or the Murghab (Ak Su) must be given the preference. If volume, it is the Sarhad branch. On this subject I would invite attention to the articles Ab-i-Wakhan, Panja, Murghab, and Oxus,* in which I have entered very fully into the relative claims of the different branches. My own view is that the Ak Su or Murghab has the strongest claims to be considered the main river, and my grounds for this conclusion are given in the article 'Oxus.'

* *Vide* pages 1, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 90, 91, of the "Gazetteer of the Afghan provinces of the Upper Oxus".

"The next point is that in a region of high and sterile mountains, the only habitable spots are to be found on the banks of the rivers which intersect it. In consequence of this, the valley is always the main thoroughfare, and both banks of a river thus naturally become inhabited by the same people for a certain portion of its course, and therefore necessarily come under one rule. In a mountainous country such a thing as a river boundary is almost unknown. The watersheds which are passable only in a few directions are, on the contrary, always accepted as boundaries. Any arrangement, therefore, by which a river is in such a country laid down as a boundary between two states is faulty. The people on both banks are connected by language, by blood, by customs, by tradition, and by proprietary rights in the land, and a river is, in such a case, as artificial a boundary as a wire fence or a degree of latitude. On the other hand, in a plain country a broad river is a very natural and proper frontier, and from Khuldask, where the Oxus leaves the mountains, we may very reasonably accept the river as the boundary.

"In the particular case in point, we have divided Darwaz so that the portion on the southern bank belongs to Afghanistan; the portion on the northern bank to Bokhara. This is utterly opposed to fact. The whole valley of the Oxus from the Tangshab downwards as far as Khuldask on both banks, belongs, and has apparently always belonged, to Darwaz, which, in its turn, has always, it is believed, been more or less tributary to Bokhara.*

"Again, Roshan and Shighnan, not to mention Wakhan, have also been thus arbitrarily divided into two portions by the agreement of 1873; while, as a matter of fact, never has one bank of the river been held by one ruler, and the other by another. These states have always been tributary to Badakhshan or allied in some form or another to that province, though at times they have paid tribute to China; while Badakhshan has frequently come under the domination of some power to the westward, lying south of the Oxus, either the former Mirs of Kunduz, or Afghanistan itself. On this subject I may refer to the articles 'Badakhshan,' 'Roshan,' and 'Shighnan.†

"As far as I can learn, neither Shighnan nor Roshan have ever been tributary to Bokhara. Quite apart, therefore, from the actual subjugation of Shighnan and Roshan by the Afghan authorities, the fact of their dependence upon Badakhshan would seem to give Afghanistan the same rights over these provinces that we acquired over Kashmir from the annexation of the Punjab, or over the Shan States by the conquest of Burma. Thus it will be seen that neither geographically, ethnologically, nor historically has Bokhara any claims over Roshan and Shighnan.

"The next point is that the agreement of 1873 practically left unsolved the definition of the boundary east of the Victoria lake. The result is, that if that treaty is accepted as a basis, a block of no-man's-land is left intervening between Wakhan and the Chinese frontier. Such a gap is in many ways dangerous, as it permits Russia to put forward claims to draw the boundary co-terminous with the Hindu Kush, and thus obtain ready access to the Kilik pass and the route through Kanjut. As long as we have wild, inhospitable, and undeveloped regions like the Upper Oxus States and the Pamirs intervening between the Russian frontier and the Hindu Kush, we have no danger to fear in that direction. On the other hand, should we abandon the rights of our allies to those regions, no difficulty would present itself in making a good road up the easy valley of the Panja towards either the Baroghil or the Kilik. Our object, therefore, should be, not to recognise in any way the legality of the 1873 arrangement. We have abandoned that arrangement in so far as the frontier is concerned between the Oxus and Persia; and having done so, it seems clear we have a right to say that the agreement no longer holds good as regards the upper waters of the Oxus. It was on ethnological grounds that we gave up much of the ground in the direction of Sarakhs and Panjdeh, and equally on ethnological grounds we have a right to say that the agreement of 1873 is faulty and untenable, as regards the Upper Oxus states. In our maps, at all events, we should adopt the watershed between the Yaz Gulam and

* *Vide* article "Darwaz" and page 96 of Gazetteer.

Vide pages 5, 14, 16, 95, 96, 97, 107 to 110, 113 and 114, of Gazetteer.

Bartang valleys as the true boundary, carrying on the line till it meets the Chinese frontier. If we do not do this, depend upon it Russia will at the earliest opportunity fill up the vacuum thus left by our punctilious regard for an agreement made in the dark, and which Russia will repudiate whenever it suits her."

As regards the eastern boundary, that is, the Afghan-Chinese frontier, it can only be said that whatever historical rights the Chinese may have had over the Pamirs and their Kirghiz inhabitants, as a matter of fact they have seldom exercised them west of the Taghdumbash Pamir, the Ak Su and the Rang Kul Pamir, though at times doubtless they have established posts as far west as the Alichur Pamir and the Little Pamir watershed. On the other hand, the Afghan boundary, though nominally this ill-defined Chinese frontier, practically has terminated with the cultivable area of Wakhan and Shighnan, and consequently the great disputable gap formed by the Pamirs has yet to be demarcated with a view to conclusively defining the limits of each of the three contending parties.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS.

It is impossible to say with any degree of certainty how far the civil administration of Badakhshan has been regulated and the exact distribution of the several districts into administrative areas. It would seem, however, that under the central authority of the Governor of Badakhshan there are various subordinate divisions usually controlled by Afghan officials called *Naibs*.

Up till 1888 the distribution was somewhat as follows:—

<i>Kataghan or Kundus</i>	.	.	.	With the exception of Khanabad was under the Beg of Talikan (<i>vide</i> Chapter III).
<i>Andarab</i>	.	.	.	} Under a <i>Hakim</i> reporting to Khanabad.
<i>Khinjan</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Doshi</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Ghori</i>	.	.	.	} Probably under separate <i>Naibs</i> or <i>Hakims</i> , but all reporting to Khanabad.
<i>Baghlan</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Narin</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Khost</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Tarkhar</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Rustak</i>	.	.	.	{ Which apparently includes Chah-i-ab, Daung and Pasaku as well as Rustak. Possibly Chah-i-ab is now separate.
<i>Shiva</i>	.	.	.	} Nothing definite is known regarding the administration of these districts. Ragh, it is believed, has retained a certain amount of independence and is under its own local <i>Khan</i> .
<i>Ragh</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Zebak</i>	.	.	.	} These three districts are or were under the <i>Naib</i> of Zebak.
<i>Ishkasham</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Ghorm</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Faisabad</i>	.	.	.	{ In which would be included the remainder of Badakhshan; some of the districts, such as Daraim, Sarghulam, etc., probably have <i>Naibs</i> of their own.
<i>Shighnan</i>	.	.	.	} Under a <i>Hakim</i> residing at Dar Panja.
<i>Roshan</i>	.	.	.	
<i>Wakhan</i>	.	.	.	

TOWNS.

What we consider towns hardly exist in the area of the Badakhshan government. Most of the places shown on our maps in large capital letters are, generally speaking, either mud forts such as Kala Panja, utterly insignificant from a military point of view, or villages which are local centres of administration like Zebak. The only places which can have any pretence to be designated as towns are:—

Faisabad.—A miserable place with about 4,000 inhabitants (*vide* Chapter III).

Khanabad.—The capital of the province (*vide* Chapter III).

Hazrat Imam.—Chiefly remarkable for its sanctity (*vide* Chapter III).

Rustak.—Probably the largest and most important commercial centre in the province.

Chah-i-ab.—A small walled town. Kunduz, it may be observed, is now in ruins and almost deserted (*vide* Chapter III).

POPULATION.

The inhabitants of Badakhshan are almost entirely Usbaks and Tajiks with a sprinkling of Afghans in the towns and a few nomad Kirghiz tribes who roam the Pamirs. The Usbaks are found almost entirely in Kataghan and the plain country of Badakhshan, while the Tajiks or Ghalchas are chiefly in the hill districts of Badakhshan and in the Upper Oxus provinces. These Tajik races probably represent the descendants of the original Aryan inhabitants of the Oxus valley. They have a distinctly Aryan type of face. Their features are good, their complexions fair, but weather-beaten, and their physique respectable; they are polite, hospitable, honest, truthful, with a complete absence of fanaticism, but they are devoid of energy or enterprise and can scarcely be called warlike though not wanting in hardihood or courage. They belong as a rule to the Shiah sect of the Muhammadan persuasion, but many, especially those in Zebak, Shighnan and Wakhan have adopted Maulai or Rafizi tenets and are in touch with their co-religionists in Bombay. The Tajiks do not all speak the Ghalcha dialects. In Darwaz, Badakhshan proper and Gharan a Persian dialect is the mother tongue, while in Munjan, Ishkasham, Shighnan, and Wakhan various Ghalcha dialects are spoken, though Persian also is very generally understood.

The Turks or Usbaks may be distinguished by the square and high cheek bone which mark the infusion of Mongol blood, while the Kirghiz is of a distinct Mongolian type and apparently of a very low order. The hard life of the Pamirs seems to have told on their physique, and most of them are stunted and shrivelled in appearance. The Turks are generally more industrious and enterprising than the Tajiks. Tajiks and Usbaks are alike in one respect, absolute detestation of Afghan rule, and when an invader does arrive not a man will raise a finger to resist him. (For further details, *vide* pages 19 to 21 "Gazetteer of the Afghan Provinces of the Upper Oxus").

CLIMATE.

As the region presents every variety of altitude from that of eternal snow to the level of the Oxus plains about a thousand feet above the sea, every variety of climate may naturally be expected. The winters in the Pamirs, and in fact everywhere above 8,000 feet, may be characterized as intensely cold and may be said to last from November to April. On the other hand in the plains between Rustak and the Oxus, the winter is comparatively mild. The summers are extremely muggy and close below Faizabad, while in the highland valleys the climate is of course delightful. The eastern half of the region, that is to say, the Pamirs, Wakhan, etc. is exposed to bitterly violent winds, the consequence of which is a marked absence of trees. On the Pamirs the atmosphere is remarkable for its rarity, but after a day or so the lungs get accustomed to this, and there is a bracing purity in the air which compensates for many discomforts. The fens of Kataghan and the riverain districts of Badakhshan are notoriously unhealthy.

SUPPLIES AND TRANSPORT.

The generally mountainous character of the country and the scarcity of population in the level cultivable tracts, renders the Badakhshan province a very unreliable one for furnishing supplies in quantities at all proportionate to the requirements of even small columns. The great tracts of Pamir land produce nothing but forage, the highland districts produce scarcely sufficient grain for their own limited consumption, while the towns of Kataghan have to import grain from Kolab in Bokharan territory. The only supplies which can be counted on are forage, fuel, and meat, for large numbers of sheep and cattle are pastured all over the country. As regards transport throughout Kataghan, Badakhshan and Wakhan, considerable attention is paid to breeding horse flesh, and the pony of these countries is famous from Lahore to Central Asia. He is an admirable

pack animal. Mules and donkeys are also fairly numerous. Carts are unknown, as also are boats; and the whole traffic of the country is conducted by pack animals, of which probably large numbers are usually obtainable.

ARMY.

The distribution of troops in Badakhshan is of course a variable quantity, and all that can be said is that under normal conditions the Badakhshan brigade is distributed between Khanabad, Faizabad, Rustak, and Shighnan. This Badakhshan brigade is part of the Turkistan army and is fairly well organized and armed. It consists chiefly of Afghans and Uzbaks. The following table showing the distribution must be taken as approximate only:—

Station.	Infantry Battalions.	Cavalry Regiments.	Khasedars.	Batteries.	REMARKS.
Khanabad	3	4	1 <i>Bahrah</i>	3	* 1 Field. 1 Mountain.
Faizabad	2	3	...	1	1 Mountain.
Rustak	3	2 <i>Bahrah</i>	1	1 Doubtful.
Shighnan (Bar Panja)	1	1	2 "	1	
Out stations	8 "	...	
Total amounts	5	10	13	4	
TOTAL MEN	3,000	1,000	1,300	...	

ROADS.

The only roads of military importance in the Badakhshan Province are—

- (1) The road leading from Tashkurghan through Khanabad and Faizabad to the Dorah pass (*vide* Chapter III).
- (2) That leading from Kolab by the Samti ferry and Rustak to Faizabad (*vide* Chapter III), or to Khanabad.
- (3) The road leading from Ferghana to Kala Panja by the Alichur and Great Pamirs (*vide* Chapter II).
- (4) The road from Shighnan to Zebak by the Ishkasham Kotal.
- (5) Zebak to Sarhad.

Nos. (1) and (2) might either or both* be used in the case of a Russian advance for the purpose of occupying Badakhshan or threatening Chitral. The distances worth noting by these routes are—

	Miles.
Tashkurghan to Khanabad	89
Khanabad to Faizabad	133
Samti Ferry to Faizabad	60
Faizabad to Dorah Kotal	110

- (3) Would be used by a Russian column intended to occupy Wakhan with or without ulterior objects. The distance from Osh to Kala Panja is 400 miles.
- (4) Would only be useful if a Russian force in Shighnan were intended to co-operate with the Badakhshan column in threatening the Dorah. The distance from Bar Panja to Zebak is 85 miles.
- (5) This road, in the event of a Russian occupation, would be of great importance, as it would represent the Russian front and would be essential for lateral communications. The distance may be noted as 133 miles.
- (4) and (5) could easily be made good cart-roads, and even in their present state are quite easy for pack animals. The subject of roads is more fully dealt with in Chapters II and III.

STRATEGICAL FEATURES.

The Badakhshan Province, in spite of its extent and the fact that it lies nearer the British dominions than either Herat or Turkistan, can only play a subordinate part in a war between Russia and England. The great mountain barrier which forms its southern boundary and the difficult nature of the routes across it effectually preclude the movements of large armies. Under the heading of the Hindu-Kush I have shown that the Dorah pass is the only one that offers a really practicable route for troops, and that even that can be easily closed by a comparatively small detachment. On the other hand, the Badakhshan Province does not offer a suitable theatre for the employment of British troops, because for about eight months any force there posted would be entirely cut off from all assistance and because without Kolab to draw on great difficulties would be encountered in keeping them supplied. The Russians, on the other hand, will certainly occupy the province, for even if they cannot affect a serious diversion across the Hindu Kush, they will at least acquire considerable local prestige, will keep us on the alert, and may possibly create a dangerous state of ferment among the Pathan tribes flanking the Khaibar route. There can be no doubt that when the time arrives the Russians will launch two columns into the country. One, probably not exceeding 2,000 in strength, will march from Ferghana and occupy Shighnan and Wakhan, the other, which may amount to 5,000 men, will either enter Badakhshan from Kolab or be detached from the main army and march from the west on Khanabad.

As regards the Ferghana column, the peace garrison of that district is about 8,000 men, and, consequently, there would be no difficulty in detaching the requisite force. We knew that when war seemed imminent in 1878 the Russians were prepared to use this route, and from the experience of 1891-92 we are confirmed in the view that the Russians would not hesitate to use this line in spite of all its difficulties. The route across the Pamirs is not easy (*vide* Chapter II), nevertheless it can be traversed, and in any year by the middle of July, Russian troops can reach Wakhan. Here they can remain till October provided they make arrangements for supplies from Shighnan, Badakhshan or Kashgharia, but as soon as the passes over the Hindu Kush are closed by snow they would probably fall back to the warmer clime of Roshan, where they could winter in comparative comfort. As regards opposition to this column we may take it for granted that the scanty local population will not resist it, while the Afghan force at Bar Panja is far too weak to court annihilation by doing so. The best course for that garrison would be to retire by the Dorah pass and aid us in closing that route, while at the same time our agents should buy up all local supplies and transport which they should either remove or destroy so as to increase the difficulties of the invader.

As regards the Badakhshan line of advance, the conditions here are somewhat similar, though the difficulties both in the matter of roads and supplies are considerably less. The Russians could certainly occupy Khanabad and Faizabad without much trouble, and I should imagine would have no real difficulty in concentrating 5,000 men at the latter place with a view to threatening the Dorah pass. Troops destined for this duty might either come from Kulab *via* the Samti ferry and Rustak or might consist of a detachment from the main column marching from Turkistan on Kabul. The Afghan garrisons of Khanabad and Faizabad could not hope to resist them and should fall back, the former on Kabul *via* Ghorī, the latter on Chitral by the Dorah, at the same time denuding the country as far as possible of transport and supplies.

Only one word more need be said regarding this region. It is that the block of mountainous country known as Kalristan is quite impracticable for military operations, and may therefore be disregarded.

References.

- (1) "Gazetteer of the Eastern Hindu Kush," by Captain E. G. Barrow, especially with reference to the Hindu Kush passes.
- (2) "Gazetteer of the Afghan Provinces of the Upper Oxus," by Major E. G. Barrow, especially the introduction.
- (3) "Final report of the strategical aspect of the Eastern Hindu Kush," by Major E. G. Barrow.
- (4) "Lecture on the Russo-Afghan frontier," by Major E. G. Barrow.

CHAPTER II.

THE UPPER OXUS PROVINCES AND THE PAMIRS.

In this chapter I propose to describe the Pamirs and the Upper Oxus provinces of Afghanistan, that is to say, the districts bordering the Oxus east of Badakhshan and Darwaz, namely, Wakhan, Ishkasham, Gharan, Shighnan, and Roshan. The importance of this region lies in the fact that it is very open to attack from the direction of Ferghana, and that in Russian occupation it would afford an excellent base from which to sow intrigues among the tribes on our side of the Hindu Kush. Conversely, as long as these districts, or even a portion of them, remain in Afghan hands, we have as it were a glacis to the rampart which the Hindu Kush itself affords us. The Oxus and its tributaries is the main feature in this region. That great river is formed by the junction close to Kala Wamar in Roshan of its two main branches, the Murghab and the Panja. The former rises far to the east in the Little Pamir, and after flowing north as the Ak Su makes a great bend west, and leaving the Pamirs flows through the narrow mountain valley of Bartang to its junction with the Panja. The latter has two main sources, the one rising in the Great Pamir, the other in the Hindu Kush, at the head of the Pamir-i-Wakhan, both unite just above Kala Panja, the capital of Wakhan. Thus it will be seen that Wakhan comprises the whole drainage of the Panja until that river enters Ishkasham. Besides the Murghab and the Panja there are two other great tributaries from the east, namely, the Ghund and the Shakh dara, which water the two principal valleys of Shighnan. All these rivers may be said to rise in the great table-land of the Pamirs, after leaving which they cut their way through deep and narrow valleys hemmed in by lofty and rocky mountain ranges. These valleys are for the most part too narrow or too stony for cultivation, but in places they open out and present luxuriant meadows or well cultivated alluvial flats. The rivers are all unnavigable, and the only means of communication are the very indifferent roads which line their banks.* Bridges are few and far between, and are for the most part extremely rickety. Most of the rivers are, however, fordable except when in flood. Villages are infrequent, and except below Bar Panja are generally a day's march apart. The whole settled population of these provinces live in these riverain villages, and being, as a rule, of a peaceable disposition forts are few. Kala Panja, Bar Panja, and Kala Wamar are the only places in the whole of this region which can be described as fortified, and even these are only mud forts of the usual Central Asian type. The inhabitants of all these states, or rather districts, are Tajiks. These Tajiks are distinctly an Aryan race, of good physique, but of a quiet, unwarlike disposition. They are entirely devoid of fanaticism and have little energy or enterprise, so that as a race they may be treated as a *quantité négligeable*. At the same time it must not be forgotten that they cordially detest the Afghans and would assist rather than oppose a Russian advance. I may now give a few words of special description to each little separate state.

WAKHAN.

Though politically this term comprises the Great and Little Pamirs as well as the inhabited valley of the Panja, practically it consists of the latter only, commencing at the point near Bozai Gumbaz, where the Panja leaves the Pamirs and ending on the frontier of Ishkasham. It is a desolate, treeless country, very sparsely inhabited. The highest village, Sarhad, is 10,800'. From here to the western frontier of Wakhan is about 110 miles, and as the valley is nowhere more than 2 miles wide, the real Wakhan may be described as a narrow strip along the Panja with tiny hamlets here and there on both banks. The total population is about 5,000. Snow lies on the ground for about five months, and even in summer it is often bitterly cold owing to the *Bad-i-Wakhan* which blows up the valley. Crops are scanty, but the pasturage is splendid in places, and *yaks*, cattle,

* An exception may be made as regards the road from Ishkasham to Bar Panja, along the left bank of the Oxus, which has recently been made by the Afghans and is a fairly good one.

sheep and goats are reared in great numbers. The road from Sarhad to the Little Panir is an extremely difficult one, but down the valley to Ishkasham it is easy enough and might without difficulty be made a good gun road. The only practicable military routes, leading out of the valley right and left, are the route from Kala Panja to the Great Pamir, and the routes which lead across the Hindu Kush by the Baroghil and Khorabot passes. The importance of Wakhan lies not so much in the utility of these passes as lines of military operation, as in the fact, that were it occupied by the Russians, the tribes to the south of the Hindu Kush would always be in a state of restless uncertainty, and a raw would be established on our flank which might be difficult to cure.

ISHKASHAM AND GHARAN.

These two small districts, together with Zebak, are now administered by the Naib of Zebak under the orders of the Governor of Badakhshan. They occupy the valley of the Panja between Wakhan and Shighnan. The fertile portion of Ishkasham is only about 6 square miles in extent. In fact it is but one large scattered village with a population of about 1,200. Gharan, though once rich and populous, is now almost uninhabited. The position of Ishkasham is strategically important as it commands the only possible winter route between Badakhshan, Wakhan, and Shighnan. The pass over the Ishkasham or Sardab Kotal is a very easy one, the crest being only 9,500' above the sea, or about 1,000' above the river. Both ascent and descent are very gradual, and there would be no difficulty in taking wheeled artillery across. The road down the valley to Bar Panja is a very good one, easy for baggage animals at all times.

SHIGHNAN.

This district comprises the Ghund and Shakh dara valleys, as well as the main valley of the Panja between Gharan and Roshan. The valley of the Panja is here more open and fertile than in Wakhan, and fruit trees abound. Ghund and Shakh dara are alpine valleys which drain the western slopes of the Pamir table-land. Both are narrow and bounded by high bare mountains, but they contain a few villages and a certain amount of cultivation. Up the Ghund lies the main route from Shighnan to the Alichur Pamir and thence to either Ferghana or Chinese Turkistan. This valley has therefore a certain strategical importance. If the Russians wished to occupy Shighnan, they would probably use this route in preference to either the route through Darwaz or that through Roshan by the valley of the Murghab. It may be useful to mention that from Bar Panja, the Ak Baital confluence, where the routes to Ferghana and Kashgar diverge, the distance is about 215 miles, of which about 122 miles is through desolate, though easy *pamir* country. The Ghund and Shakh dara unite before joining the Panja, and the united stream is known as the Suchandara. At the junction of the latter with the Panja the valley opens out to a width of about 4 miles, forming a fine plain with valuable pasturage. The fort of Bar Panja stands on the top of a cliff, overlooking the river, and about 250' above it on its left bank. It is a miserable place crowded with barracks and stables and sutlers' shops. There is no town at Bar Panja, but villages and orchards occupy the hill-sides round about. The Afghans hold the place with about 800 regulars, including half a mule battery (1886). In capable hands the position of Bar Panja could doubtless be turned to account as it watches both the valley of the Oxus and the route from the Alichur Pamir; but situated as it is at a distance from all support and in the midst of a population decidedly inimical to Afghan rule, it offers an easy prey to the Russians whenever they choose to take it. The people of Shighnan are Tajiks and in no way warlike or turbulent, but may be reckoned on as useful allies to the Russians whenever they choose to advance.

ROSHAN.

This district is really a part of Shighnan. It may be said to consist of three distinct tracts:—

- (1) Roshan proper, that is the valley of the Oxus between Shighnan and Darwaz.

- (II) Bartang, the cultivated portion of the Murghab valley.
- (III) Pasar, which includes the Murghab valley above Bartang and the Kudara.

The capital is the dilapidated fort of Wamar. Roshan is doubtless the most favoured portion of the Oxus valley, both soil and climate being excellent. The population is at least 3,000, while in Bartang and Pasar there are probably 2,000 more; the Pasar people are almost entirely Kirghiz, the rest are Tajiks. Roshan can be approached from three directions; from Darnaz, by the valley of the Murghab or Ak Su, and from Shighnan. The route through Darnaz is a difficult one and very circuitous from a Russian point of view, while that by the Murghab is only practicable for men on foot and quite unsuitable for the passage of troops, so that it may be regarded as almost certain that any column intended for the occupation of Roshan and Shighnan will come by way of the Alichur Pamir and the Ghund valley. Further, it may be taken for granted that the Afghans will by themselves be quite unable to offer effective resistance, and that they will either retire on Zebak or be uselessly annihilated.

In addition to the settled and inhabited portions of the districts above described, there are large areas of *pamir* land which politically belong to either Wakhan or Shighnan, though the exact extent of jurisdiction has never yet been defined. As these *pamirs* all present the same characteristics it will be more convenient to describe them under one general head than separately, or even to attempt to differentiate between those which belong to Russia, to China, or to Afghanistan.

THE PAMIRS.

The *pamir* region is not a plateau in the ordinary acceptance of the term, but rather a lofty upland from 12,000 feet to 15,000 feet above the level of the sea, intersected in every direction by ranges of bare, rocky, snow-clad mountains rising from 15,000 feet to 20,000 feet. The valleys between these ranges in places open out forming flat or gently shelving troughs from one to several miles in width, covered generally with low worm-wood scrub about a foot high, but here and there with the richest grasses. Such flat open valleys are known as *pamirs*, while narrow deep ravines are never so described. It is therefore quite inaccurate to speak of the whole region as *the pamir*, though that term is a convenient expression for describing the wild uninhabited tract between Chinese Turkistan and the settled Tajik districts of Wakhan and Shighnan. There is not one *pamir*, but several *pamirs*, such as the Pamir-i-Kalan or Great Pamir, the Pamir-i-Khurd or Little Pamir, the Alichur, the Taghdumbash, the Rang Kul pamir, etc. It is a common idea that the Pamirs are traversable in every direction, but this is not the case. The mountain ranges are quite impracticable, except at certain well-defined points, and there are only a few routes which are ever used.

The principal routes are—

- I.—From Wakhan to Yarkand by the Little Pamir; the winter route.
- II.—From Wakhan (Kala Panja) to Yarkand by the Great Pamir; the summer route.
- III.—From the Alai *via* the Great Kara Kul to the Ak Baital junction with the Ak Su.
- IV.—From the Ak Baital to the Alichur Pamir by the Neza Tash pass (14,200').
- V.—From the Alichur Pamir to the Great Pamir by the Khargosh pass, and thence to Kala Panja.
- VI.—From the Alichur Pamir to Shighnan by the Ghund valley.
- VII.—From the Ak Baital up the Ak Su valley to the Little Pamir.
- VIII.—From the Ak Baital to Kashghar by Rang Kul.

These routes are only good by comparison. The absence of supplies and scarcity of firewood, as well as of forage in places, are alone sufficient to render the passage of large bodies of troops impossible, while, except in the actual *pamirs* or flat valleys, the roads are often rugged and difficult.

Of the above mentioned routes, the most important from a Russian point of view are III, IV, V, VI, and VII. Of these, III is an obligatory route for any column advancing from Ferghana. There is no other worth considering. From Osh in Ferghana to the Ak Su it is 244 miles or nearly three weeks' march, and no expedition could well start before June on account of the snow on the Taldik pass (12,000'). The Kizil Su which waters the Alai is always fordable, and the Alai valley with its excellent pasturage affords a suitable point for establishing a secondary base, especially as between June and September it is teeming with the flocks and herds of the Kirghiz. The Kizil Art pass between the Alai valley and the Kara Kul basin is an easy pass (14,200'). The road through the Kara Kul is quite easy, but forage and fuel are very scarce. The Tuyuk pass, though 15,200' above the sea, is by no means difficult, and it would be quite feasible to construct a cart-road for summer use all the way from Ferghana to the Ak Su. It is the barren nature of the country alone that presents difficulties.

From the Ak-Baital junction the Russians, if their objective were Shighnan, or even the Dorah pass, would use Routes IV and VI. If Wakhan and the Baroghil, Routes IV and V. If Kanjut, or even the Khorabort pass, Route VII. The development of events in Hunza and the very secondary value of the Khorabort pass route, which is not open till September, renders very unlikely a demonstration by way of the Ak Su valley and the Little Pamir, while the ease with which a relatively small force could detain an enemy wishing to use the Baroghil route to Yasin renders it equally unlikely that the Russians would attempt to attack along that line. I am therefore of opinion that they will, in the first instance, content themselves with occupying Shighnan and Wakhan with a view to using the latter country as a base for intrigue and for the purpose of threatening us, and the former country as the channel through which they will draw such supplies as it, together with Roshan and Darwaz, can provide, and to which also they can retire during the inclement winter season. If this view be correct, the most important Pamir routes are IV, V, and VI, *i.e.*, those through the Alichur and Great Pamirs. The Murghab or Ak Su is easily forded. The road then leads up the Kara Su valley to the easy Neza Tash water-parting (14,000 feet). The Alichur valley is now entered, and this *pamir* affords for 50 miles an easy, level road with water, forage, and firewood along it. From the Alichur to the Great Pamir by far the best route is by the Khargosh pass, which is about 14,500 feet and by no means difficult, while from the Great Pamir to Kala Panja, there are no serious obstacles to retard troops. The distance from the junction of the Ak Baital with the Ak Su to Kala Panja, is about 156 miles, so that altogether it may be reckoned a month's march from Osh to Wakhan, and no force could well arrive there much before the middle of July. The route from the Alichur by the Ghund valley to Bar Panja in Shighnan is not an easy one for laden animals, while the distance from the Ak Baital junction is 200 miles.

Besides the Khargosh there are two other passes leading from the Alichur to the Great Pamir, namely, the Bash Gumbaz, high, difficult, and little used, and the Kojiguit Dawan, an easy route leading to the Aidcen Kul, the upper lake of the Great Pamir, which possibly might be preferred to the Khargosh route. From the Great Pamir to Wakhan, apart from the main route by the valley of the Panja, there is no route practicable for troops, but there are several easy passes opening on to the Little Pamir east of the lake, notably the Andamin or Benderski.

The climate of the Pamirs is very severe in winter, which lasts from October till May, and during these months the deep snows and biting winds render them both uninhabitable and impassable for any but the hardy Kirghiz, and even the Kirghiz only remain on the Pamirs during the summer months. In winter they generally migrate to Kashgharia, the Alai, and the upper valleys of Shighnan. The total number of the Pamir Kirghiz has been estimated at about 5,000 persons. They are quiet, inoffensive people, and would certainly offer no resistance to any invader. The forage in places is magnificent, but such places are often widely separated. There are no trees except here and there a little dwarf birch, but the roots of a species of worm-wood or "saxaul" afford an indifferent fuel which is everywhere procurable.

As regards the rivers of the Pamirs there are only four or five of any size or importance ; the Panja, the Ak Su or Murghab, the Ghund, the Shakhdara, the Kudara, and the Ak Baital. The two last named are purely *pamir* rivers, shallow and easily fordable, so also are the upper courses of the others, but in their lower portions, where they flow through the inhabited valleys of Wakhan Shighnan, and Roshan, they are for the most part rapid, turbulent rivers, quite unnavigable and difficult to cross even where fordable. In early summer these rivers are very full owing to the melting of the snows, and this is especially the case in the afternoons, so that as a rule fords can only be used early in the morning. For this and other reasons the best months for military operations are August and September.

References.

- (1) "Gazetteer of the Afghan Provinces of the Upper Oxus," by Major E. G. Barrow, especially articles Wakhan, Shighnan, Roshan, Ishkasham, Pamirs, Murghab, Panja, Kirghiz, etc.
 - (2) "Lecture on the Russo-Afghan Frontier," 1889, by Major E. G. Barrow.
 - (3) "Notes of a journey from Osh to Yasin," by Mr. St. John Littledale.
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CHAPTER III.

BADAKHSHAN AND KATAGHAN.

As already explained in the introductory chapter there are two Badakhshans, the political and the geographical. I am here dealing with the latter only when speaking of Badakhshan, that is to say, with the basin of the Kokcha and its tributaries. This lesser Badakhshan, until quite recently, had from time immemorial been ruled by its own Mirs, and so conveyed to the Asiatic mind the idea of a distinct Tajik principality. It was, and is, bounded on the north by the Oxus and the Cis-Oxus districts of Darwaz; on the west by Kataghan or Kunduz, the Lataband range forming as a rule the dividing line; on the south by Kafistan, from which it is divided by the great watershed of the Hindu Kush, and, on the east, by the long spur from Tirich Mir which separates it from the Upper Oxus valley, that is to say, the portion of the river above Darwaz.

Except near the Oxus the country is distinctly alpine in character, and the rivers are for the most part rapids running in narrow defiles between steep and stony mountains. Here and there the gorges open out into valleys of no great extent but great fertility, while further north towards Chah-i-ab a level country is reached, which stretches to the Oxus. The climate varies considerably with the altitude, but the bulk of the country lies at temperate elevations. About Rustak and Chah-i-ab it is very hot in summer and even Faizabad (3,800 feet), is unpleasantly warm. The population is probably about 120,000 souls, mostly Tajiks, but with a fair proportion of Turks in the plains to the north, but whether Tajiks or Turks all are ill-disposed towards their Afghan rulers. The great geographical features of the country are: first, the Hindu Kush, which here forms an impassable barrier for any but mountaineers, except at one point,—the Dorah pass; second, the Kokcha, which is the main drainage channel of the country; third, the great spur on the east which, with its continuation the Shiva mountains, cuts it off entirely from Darwaz.

From a military point of view the only importance of the region is with reference to the approaches from the Oxus and Khanabad to Faizabad, the capital, and thence to the Dorah pass. It will therefore be unprofitable to describe the country, except with regard to these routes, especially as our knowledge of the hill districts is extremely limited and vague.

It will be convenient if I commence with the Dorah pass. This is the route by which all the trade of Badakhshan with Peshawar is conducted. The *kotal* is about 14,800 feet above the sea, and consequently for the greater part of the year it is closed by snow. For three or four months, however, it may be crossed by pack animals, and though in its present state it cannot be considered a road fit for the passage of an army, still a small column lightly equipped might use it, especially if the route were improved. I may here remark that none of the great Tartar conquerors ever used it for the march of their armies. The Dorah pass is about 48 miles or 5 marches from Chitral. The descent from the crest to Lake Dufferin is very steep in places, but not otherwise difficult. At the lake we reach one of the main sources of the Kokcha, and from here we follow the course of the Warduz. The road is practicable for laden animals, and might easily be made an excellent one suitable for the march of a military column. Several villages are passed, and at about 32 miles from the lake the broad open grassy plain of Zebak over a mile in width is reached, where a considerable force might be encamped. The position of Zebak is important, as it not only covers the Dorah, Nuksan, and Agram passes into Chitral but also the route over the Sardab Kotal into Wakhan, the main route in fact from Badakhshan to the Pamirs and the Upper Oxus. The position at Zebak would indeed be a perfect one for resisting an enemy from the north, were it not that it can be turned from Faizabad by way of Jurm, which route however is a difficult one. The elevation of the Zebak plain is about 8,000' and

the climate is severe, while from August to January the strong winds which prevail are very trying. The meadows of Zebak afford splendid pasturage, but grain and fuel are scarce in these parts. The people hereabouts are Persian-speaking Tajiks, devoid of all fanaticism and of a thoroughly peaceful disposition.

From Zebak to Faizabad it is 73 miles. The road lies down the narrow defile of the Warduz till the Boharak plain is reached, about 45 miles below Zebak. This plain is at the junction of the Warduz, Kokcha, and Sarghulam, and is well cultivated and productive, being one of the best grain and fruit districts of Badakhshan. The altitude of Boharak is 6,000 feet above the sea, and the climate is delightful. This, doubtless, would be the point where a Russian force would concentrate, and where it would form a temporary base before attempting to cross the Dorah. From Boharak to Faizabad it is about 24 miles, the road being easy and passing through numerous hamlets and villages. It will be observed that I have not attempted to describe the road from Chitral to the Dorah. For information regarding this portion of the route the reader is referred to Route No. 15 in my "Gazetteer of the Eastern Hindu Kush" and to my secret "Report on the Strategical Aspect of the Eastern Hindu Kush."

Faizabad, the capital of Badakhshan, stands on the right bank of the Kokcha, which here flows in a rocky trench-like bed, while behind the town rise successive ridges of hills. It is now-a-days a miserable place with only some 4,000 inhabitants. The climate is not good, and the place is liable to epidemics, but the situation is strategically important as from it bifurcate the roads to Khanabad, Rustak, and Zebak. The garrison in 1886 consisted of—

2 battalions, of infantry,
2 troops of cavalry,
1 battery.

The inhabitants of Faizabad are mostly Tajiks, but there is a fair sprinkling of Uzbaks and Afghans.

From Faizabad to Khanabad it is 133 miles, or half a month's march. The road is fairly good and is practicable for guns. Shortly after leaving Faizabad the road leaves the Kokcha valley, crosses over to the Daraim valley and thence to the Lataband pass *via* Teshkan and Kishm. The pass is only about 5,500 feet above sea level and is quite easy. From the Lataband to Khanabad there are no difficulties to speak of.

The road from Faizabad to Rustak is easy for laden mules, or even camels, the distance is 18 miles. Rustak is an important trade centre and stands in a cultivated plain about two miles in width. It probably contains about 10,000 inhabitants, and is certainly a more thriving town than Faizabad. From Rustak a much-used pack road runs *via* Chah-i-ab to the Oxus, and thence to Kolab, crossing the river at the Samti ferry. The road on leaving Rustak follows the cultivated valley of the Rustak river for about 14 miles, then crossing the low Khoja Surkh hills enters Chah-i-ab, a walled town with a scanty population, six miles further on. Samti is about 25 miles beyond Chah-i-ab. The ferry here is of varying width, according to the state of the river, and is crossed on skin rafts towed by horses. The hills approach the river on the Afghan side, leaving, however, a strip of level cultivated land between their base and the river bank.

It is very unlikely that a Russian force would march on Badakhshan by way of Kolab, as that would involve a long and unnecessary detour through difficult country, but the route from Kolab to Rustak and Faizabad would doubtless be largely utilized as a line of supply, and it is one which would require no defensive precautions. Any force intended for offensive operations, or even as a covering detachment, would probably come by way of Khanabad, and after establishing a secondary base at Boharak would move on Zebak, whence it would be in a position to either threaten the Dorah and Chitral or to move on the Baroghil by way of Ishkasham and Wakhan. It may be observed here that the route over the Sardab Kotal to Ishkasham is an extremely easy one, and that there would be no insurmountable difficulty in taking wheeled artillery to the Baroghil.

Westward of the Dorah there is no known pass leading from Badakhshan towards India, and the country on the right flank of the Khanabad-Zebak road is consequently of no military importance.

As regards the left flank there is practically no direct communication between Darwaz and Badakhshan, so that the whole route may be regarded as unassailable from a flank.

References.

- (1) "Lecture on the Russo-Afghan Frontier", 1889, by Major E. G. Barrow.
- (2) "Gazetteer of the Afghan Provinces of the Upper Oxus", by Major E. G. Barrow, especially articles Badakhshan, Faizabad, and Rustak.

KATAGHAN.

The Kataghan division of the Badakhshan province is practically the same as the old Khanate of Kunduz before the absorption of Badakhshan proper by Murad Beg. Fifty years ago Kataghan or Kunduz was an important Usbak state ruled by a powerful independent chief, the Mir Murad mentioned above. His sway extended not only over Kataghan, Khulm, and Badakhshan, but reached to Kolab on the north of the Oxus. In 1859 the Afghans conquered Kunduz, which then became tributary to the Amirs of Kabul. Sultan Murad, the grandson of the famous Mir Murad, contrived to maintain a partial independence during the reign of Sher Ali, and on the appearance of Abdul Rahman he promptly offered him assistance, and was, in consequence permitted to retain the administration of the Usbak districts of Kataghan under the Governor appointed by Abdul Rahman, while Talikan was assigned to him as a residence. In 1888, however, he joined in Ishak Khan's rebellion, and was in consequence dispossessed.

The Kataghan division is bounded on the north by the Oxus. The western boundary of Kataghan, or in other words of the province of Badakhshan, commencing at the junction of the Kunduz river with the Oxus, passes southward across the desert between the mountains and the Oxus to the small village of Khairabad on the Tashkurghan-Kunduz road. Thence it may be said to follow roughly the western watershed of the Kunduz river over a high plateau to the Mirza Had Bel Kotal, and thence along the crest of the Chongur mountain. Then turning south-east it crosses the Surkhab or upper Kunduz river just above Shutar Jangal, and following a spur gains the watershed of the Hindu Kush which eastwards forms the southern boundary of the Badakhshan province.

The dividing line between the Kataghan and Badakhshan divisions of the province may be said to run along the spurs of the Lataband till these abut on the left bank of the Kokcha and then to follow that river to its junction with the Oxus at Khwaja Ghar. It may be observed, however, that Kala Aoghan on the main Khanabad-Badakhshan road, though east of the Lataband, has been affiliated to Talikan. Thus it will be seen the Kataghan division comprises a large area of mountain and plain; but the mountain districts as a rule, though they formed part of the old Kunduz state, were really quite distinct from Kataghan. Their inhabitants were for the most part Tajiks and not Usbaks, and in the Surkhab basin, at all events, Kataghan was only considered to commence at Jar, north of Baghlan. This distinction is still recognized by the Afghans, for while the Usbak districts in the plain country (except Khanabad and its neighbourhood) were till 1888 administered according to Usbak customs by the Beg of Talikan, who held the country in fief from the Amir, the mountain districts of Kataghan, such as Andarab, Khinjan, Doshi, Ghor, Baghlan, Narin, Khost, Farkhar, etc., were under the direct control of the Governor of Badakhshan.

The great geographical feature of Kataghan is the Kunduz river, called also the Ak Sarai and Surkhab. This river and its affluents drain almost the whole of the district. The Kunduz, it will be seen from the map, is formed by the junction of the Surkhab and the Bangi. The former stream with its affluents drain Narin, Baghlan, and the districts described in Chapter II, Part II, while

the Bangi drains the hill districts between Khanabad and the Lataband range. It has two important tributaries, the Talikan river and the stream which drains Khost and Iskamish.

Very little is known of the hill districts, except those described in Part II.

Khost is described as a valley about 500 yards wide and 12 miles long, with numerous villages and orchards. It is said to contain some 4,000 families, and that a fortnight's supplies for an Anglo-Indian brigade could be collected without difficulty. From Khost there are mule roads leading to Panjshir, Andarab, Talikan, and Khanabad. It is about four longish marches from the latter place.

Narin is a narrow valley very similar to Andarab (*vide* Chapter II, Part II), except that its inhabitants are chiefly Uzbaks. There is a good mule road through it from Andarab (*vide* Route No. 1, Kabul series) which crosses the watershed at the Murgh Kotal (7,500 feet). From Narin there is a good road to Kunduz *via* Jar and the valley of the Surkhab, and another good road by the Jaburdagh valley to Khanabad. There are also cross-roads leading into Ghorī. Narin contains about 8,000 inhabitants. Jaburdagh is a large fertile valley where a fair amount of supplies could be obtained.

Baghlan is the valley of the Surkhab, from where it leaves the Ghorī district down as far as Jar, that is to say, it extends for about 90 miles along that river, which in autumn is about 60 yards wide and 2 feet to 3½ feet deep, with a gravelly bottom and easy banks. In spring, however, the river is quite unfordable. At Kishlak Kazi, where the *Hakim* resides, the valley is about 6 miles wide. The southern part of Baghlan is fertile and populous, but further north a good deal of it is bare, open plain. It is said that supplies for three months, for about an Anglo-Indian brigade, could be collected in the district. There is not much grass, but *bhusa* is plentiful. The inhabitants (estimated at 6,500) are chiefly Afghans and Tajiks. The main road from Kabul to Badakhshan lies through Baghlan. (Route No. XI, Kabul series).

At Jar, Kataghan proper is entered. From here the river and road pass through a defile called the Dara Jalogir, after which the track is over low hills or downs on the right bank. The plain country is entered close to Khanabad. The road is made and supposed to be practicable for artillery. The only places in Kataghan which can possibly be called towns are Khanabad, Kunduz, Hazrat Imam, and Talikan.

Khanabad is the capital of the Badakhshan province. It is situated on the south bank of the Bangi among swampy rice fields. The ruins of the old town of the same name are opposite on the north bank. Khanabad has neither walls nor citadel, but it has an Afghan garrison, the normal strength of which is—

2 regiments, infantry	}	Total about 2,500 men.
2 " cavalry		
1 field battery		
1 mountain battery		

Though it is the capital of the province, the total population was said, by Mr. Elias in 1886, not to exceed 4,000.

Kunduz is now a ruined and deserted city, though it once contained a very large population. It stands on a peninsula of raised ground jutting out into a sea of swamps and reeds which stretch along the river valley. The walls and gates even now are high and imposing, though breached and dilapidated. A small modern *basar* lies outside the western wall. The Ak Sarai is here a large river which can however in winter be forded two miles above Kunduz.

Talikan lies in a fertile plain on the right bank of the river so named. It is surrounded by down-like hills. It is really only a large village of some 2,000 inhabitants, but till lately had some local reputation as the residence of Murad Beg. Talikan is considered the healthiest and best part of the low country of Kataghan. The road from Khanabad to Faizabad lies through it. There is also a road to Rustak, which is 3 marches distant.

Hazrat Imam.—In the north-west corner of Kataghan, west of the Koh-i-Ambar, in the angle between the Oxus and the Kunduz river, lies the large open tract of Hazrat Imam or Imam Sahib, a considerable portion of this is *chol* or

desert, and waterless, though well grassed in spring, but the town stands in the midst of a highly productive plain, and is surrounded by villages, whose fertile fields are watered by canals from the Oxus. There are also fine pasture lands along the south bank of that river from the mouth of the Kokcha downwards. Along the whole south of the Hazrat Imam plain are the swamps and fens of the Bangi and Kunduz rivers, which run through great reed beds and marshes noted for their malarious character. Hazrat Imam derives its name from a shrine of great repute. It is an unwallled town of some size, is the centre of considerable trade, and is said to contain about 4,000 Kataghani families. It stands on a large canal taken off from the Oxus, which is about 9 miles distant. The town has some importance from its position on the roads from Kataghan to Kurghan Tapa and Kolab, the latter of which is an extremely fertile district and might be a useful base of supply to a force moving through Khanabad. The road to Kolab is said to be good and easy. In winter the Oxus, it is said, can be forded at three places. The highest is the Sarai ford by which the Kolab road crosses, the second is where the Kurghan Tapa road crosses, and the third is the Sur Baital passage where the Oxus runs through a rock-strewn gorge, and can be crossed by jumping from rock to rock. There is a ferry (one boat) across the Oxus at Takht-i-Kowat between the Wakish and Kunduz junctions. The road from Hazrat Imam to Khanabad, or Kunduz presents no difficulties except want of water in the *chol* and the passage of the Bangi or Khanabad river.

The best road from Tashkurghan to Imam Sahib is round by Khisht Tapa on the Oxus through Kalazal to Kunda Guzar on the Kunduz river. This is circuitous, nearly 80 miles, but it avoids the worst part of the desert. The ford at Kunda Guzar can only be used in winter. In summer people cross on *masak* rafts.

The total population of Kataghan is estimated by Mr. Elias at 120,000, about half of whom are perhaps in the plain country. The people in the plains are nearly all Usbaks. Their physique is poor owing to the unhealthiness of the country and the miserable conditions under which the people live in squalid reed huts. The principal products of Kataghan are sheep and horses; the latter are mostly cobs and ponies. It is altogether a miserable country, though some of the higher valleys are pleasant enough.

Below Kunduz the river is a considerable stream with jungly and reedy banks—the haunt of the tiger. It is quite unfordable in summer and is navigable to Lallakai on the Turkistan road. There is a regular ferry at Khak Kani, 2 miles below Lallakai.

As regards routes the only important ones in Kataghan are—

- (1) The desert route from Tashkurghan to Kunduz.
- (2) The route from Khanabad to Faizabad (133 miles).
- (3) The route to Hazrat Imam and thence to Kolab.
- (4) The route to Kabul *via* Baghlan, Ghorī, and the Chahardar or Kaoshan passes.
- (5) The route to Narin and Andarab.

The distance from Kabul to Khanabad is about 230 miles, or 19 stages by the Chahardar route, and guns have been taken the whole way, so the difficulties cannot be very great; but nevertheless the road is not of any great military importance. It is very unlikely the Russians would make Khanabad an objective unless it were intended to form there a depot of supplies from Kolab, Badakhshan, etc., with a view to facilitating an advance from Turkistan by way of Haibak and Ghorī. It might be an important strategic point in the improbable case of resistance being offered to the Russian advance in the direction of Haibak, in which case a Russian column at Khanabad would threaten the line of communications through Ghorī and Doshi, and it would then be necessary to detach a force to contain this Khanabad column. With reference to this it may be noted that from Khanabad to Pul-i-Khomri in Ghorī it is 66 miles, or 5 marches, and from Tashkurghan to Khanabad about 85 miles.

References.

- "Report of a journey through Badakhshan", by Mr. Ney Elias.
- "Afghan Boundary Commission Records".
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Appendix.

Strategical aspect of the Northern Frontier of Kashmir.

The passes between Chinese Turkistan or Kashgharia and Kashmir are scarcely connected with the geography of Afghanistan, still they are connected with a region which flanks that under review, and as it is more than possible that Kashgharia will some day pass into Russian hands, it is worth while enquiring whether their position in Kashgharia would give them a military advantage in any offensive campaign directed against us. I have, therefore, added as an appendix this brief note which is based on Chapter VII of Captain Younghusband's *Report of a Mission to the Northern Frontier of Kashmir, 1889*.

Eastward of the Kilik pass the great divide which separates the Indian empire from Central Asia, is known as the Mustagh and the Karakorum mountains. Across this range from east to west there are the following passes:—

- (1) Karakorum pass (18,550') easy and practicable all the year round for ponies and camels.
- (2) Saltoro pass, now disused, and quite impracticable.
- (3) Mustagh passes, ditto.
- (4) Shimshal pass (14,700') easy and practicable for ponies.
- (5) Khunjurab pass (14,300') ditto.
- (6) Mintaka pass (14,400') practicable for ponies.

The country between the Karakorum and the Shimshal is a glacier region quite impracticable for troops, so that as a matter of fact there is no route from the north into Baltistan, and an enemy from Yarkand must either advance on Hunza or on Leh. The passes (4), (5), and (6) into Hunza are comparatively easy, but absolutely useless owing to the difficulties the roads present on the southern or rather western side of the watershed, and consequently we may confine our attention to the route from Yarkand to Leh.

Three routes practicable for ponies lead from Yarkand, *vis.*:—

- (1) By Kugiar and the Yangi Dawan. This is the best route in the winter, but from April to September is impassable on account of the depth of the rivers.
- (2) By the Kilian pass and Shahidula, the route now in use by traders. The pass is very difficult, 17,800' high and very steep.
- (3) By the Sanju pass also a difficult one but in common use.

On the whole it may be said that for a force based on Yarkand there are no great obstacles to an advance as far as the Karakorum, and the pass itself can be crossed without difficulty, but on the southern side it would be otherwise. Between the Karakorum pass and the Shayok river the road passes through narrow deep gorges where it would be easy to check the advance of an army. Then the Shayok river has to be crossed. This is never fordable, and there are neither boats nor timber procurable in the neighbourhood. The next obstacles are the Saser pass (17,800') and the Karawal Pass (15,000'), both difficult, while beyond this again would be the second passage of the Shayok and the difficult Khardung pass (17,500'). All these obstacles combined render this line of approach so difficult and hazardous that it would be sheer folly to attempt it in the face of armed resistance, and probably the Kashmir Imperial Service troops could, unassisted, secure the safety of this portion of our frontier against any enemy.

Scale 1 Inch = 24 Miles.

Miles 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 Miles

71



38

69

73

75

36

36

